



TexUnite

Project: 2024-1-DE01-KA220-HED-000253935 – TexUnite - Service Learning on Sustainability in Textile and Fashion Education

SL Project Title: Creating Textiles through Creative Recycling Objects for People with Special Needs

Partner University: University of Education Freiburg, Department of Everyday Culture, Sport and Health, Subject Fashion and Textiles

Name of the Stakeholders: Different schools for pupils with special needs (e.g. Rossentalschule Albstadt, Germany) and institutions in Baden-Württemberg, Germany

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**Hochschule
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Executive Summary

The service-learning (SL) project implemented by the University of Education Freiburg involved 23 students in developing creative projects for people with special needs. In the first project phase, the students preparing to become teachers in secondary schools or in special needs education learned various textile techniques and explored possibilities for designing textile objects. They were asked to get in contact with institutions, schools, or individuals who work with people with special needs or are themselves affected by special needs. In the second phase, the students designed and produced objects for either an individual or a group of people with special needs. The aim was to improve comfort, support learning, or sensory experiences. Students were encouraged to experiment with new materials and, whenever possible, to incorporate upcycled textiles into their designs. Throughout this process, they documented and reflected on their design process and their interactions with people with special needs in a portfolio consisting of written reflections and pictures.

Additionally, a virtual exchange (VE) with the Department of Knitting and Clothing at the Faculty of Industrial Design and Business Administration at the Gheorghe Asachi Technical University of Iași in Romania provided students with opportunities to enhance their intercultural, linguistic, and digital skills. Pre- and post-project assessments indicate that the project improved students' awareness of sustainability, as well as their empathy for people with special needs.

Background and Context

The project enabled the students to come into direct contact with people with special needs and their individual requirements, and to create objects that provide real benefits. In this way, the learning of theoretical and practical skills was combined into a meaningful learning experience. In addition, the students explored ways of utilising used textiles in their projects in order to promote sustainable thinking. Through this experience, they were able to engage with the important concepts of sustainability and SL and consider how these ideas can be integrated into the schools where they will work as teachers.

Objectives

- ❖ Learning textile and design techniques
- ❖ Establishing direct contact with people with special needs
- ❖ Developing design solutions for people with special needs
- ❖ Creating objects based on the principles of SL
- ❖ Reflecting on the design and learning process

Methodology

The four seminars were divided into two that were mostly theoretical and two that were mostly practical. In the theoretical seminars, students learned about textile technology while also being introduced to SL methodology, textile didactics, and textile design as part of the curriculum. In the practical seminars, students learned various textile techniques, including crochet, sewing, printing, embroidery, weaving, and felting. They applied these techniques to design and produce objects that addressed specific needs. Supported by the theoretical knowledge they had acquired, they learned to use these techniques to create special objects for special demands.

Implementation Details

The project took place within four courses of the module 'M3 Studies of Everyday Culture: Textile Material Culture' during the second or third semester of the Bachelor's degree programme. Led by Dr. Dorit Köhler and Dr. Nadine Kitzlinger, the class involved 23 BSc students. The project was conducted during the winter semester of 2025/2026 and included 84 hours of seminars and practical work at the university, as well as additional hours of independent work at home.

Results and Impact

Students reflected on the specific requirements of people with special needs and developed design solutions to support them. They demonstrated creativity through sustainable practices and civic engagement by participating in socially oriented activities. In addition, they developed communication skills and increased their empathy towards others.

Challenges and Lessons Learned

For some students, reflecting on the needs of people with special needs was initially challenging. About half of the students had not previously had contact with this group, and it required considerable effort to identify individuals or institutions willing to collaborate and to design appropriate objects. Another challenge was working with used textiles while considering sustainability aspects.

For the lecturers, the main challenge was finding effective ways to enhance communication and direct interaction during the VE with students at the partner university.

Reflection and Feedback

Students gained confidence in designing and creating objects that support people with special needs. They also improved their English language proficiency through VE. Student reflections underline that practical knowledge can be developed within a social context, and some students became more aware of opportunities for recycling and upcycling textiles. This SL project represents an educational case study that provides real-world experiences and enhances student engagement with social issues. It helped students become more empathetic and responsible citizens. In the future, this experience may encourage them to integrate the principles of sustainability and SL into their own teaching practices in schools.

Future Directions

The project outcomes will inform future SL activities within the TexUnite framework. The OER materials will be completed and uploaded to the ZOERR and EPALE repositories for reuse and dissemination.